

The Boulder Residents' Transportation Survey 1999

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Executive Summary

In the fall of 1997, the city of Boulder's Transportation Division commissioned a survey about citizen's perceptions and opinions about transportation within the city as a follow-up to the adoption of the 1996 Transportation Master Plan Update. This effort has been repeated annually in 1998 and 1999. The purpose of the survey is to track trends in residents' general satisfaction, perceptions, and behaviors related to transportation in Boulder. One component of the survey asks respondents about a specific transportation-related topic about which planners would like information. This topic changes from year to year. This year, respondents were asked a series of questions about transportation project funding and priorities.

A random selection of Boulder area households was contacted by telephone to participate in this survey between November 8 to November 16, 1999. Four hundred interviews were completed. Results were statistically weighted so that demographics of respondents matched population demographics. The margin of error around the results is $\pm 5\%$.

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Annual Survey Results

Perception of the Transportation "Challenges" Facing Boulder

- Over the last three years, growth or over-development and traffic-related issues have been cited by residents as the top two challenges facing Boulder. Growth issues were ranked first over traffic and transportation-related concerns in 1997 and 1998 by just a few percentage points. In 1999, however, traffic-related "challenges" were considered most important by 40% of residents, an increase of about 10 percentage points since last year.

- Improvement of bus and transit service was the most frequent response given by respondents when asked what they thought could be done to improve transportation in Boulder (43%), a similar proportion as in previous survey years. While 21% of 1999 survey respondents offered no suggestions for improvement, improvements mentioned by between 9-12% of respondents each were: traffic signal timing, and improving the ease of getting around town by car, and improving bike transportation facilities.

These results are somewhat different from previous years in that improving ease of getting around by car was mentioned by a somewhat larger proportion of the respondents while reducing traffic congestion was mentioned by somewhat fewer than in previous years.

Experience of Getting Around Boulder

- Respondents to the survey were asked to rate their experience in getting around Boulder. On average, ratings fell in the middle of a scale from very bad to very good. A little more than one fourth of respondents rated their experience in getting around town as "neither good nor bad," another 26% responded that their experiences were "good" and 32% rated their experience as "bad."

These results represent a slight shift towards more negative ratings of the experience in getting around town over the three year period, but this shift was not statistically significant.

Planning for Transportation in Boulder

Survey participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about transportation and traffic in Boulder. Most of these statements were about policy directions the city could take in transportation issues, although a few statements considered respondents' perceptions of the City's handling of transportation tax money and the causes of traffic congestion.

Over half of respondents "strongly" agreed that the city should concentrate on providing more alternatives to the automobile as the solution to relieving current and future traffic congestion. (About one in five respondents disagreed with this statement.)

- More than two-thirds (69%) of the respondents agreed that the city of Boulder should give a higher priority to funding transportation improvements to serve modes other than the automobile, although fewer than half of respondents "strongly agreed" with this statement.

- About one third (32%) of the respondents disagreed with a statement suggesting the city of Boulder should widen exiting roads and build new roads in order to relieve current and future traffic congestion.

- Most respondents (76%) thought the city should be doing something to decrease traffic congestion, although nearly a quarter of respondents agreed with a statement that the "city of Boulder should not attempt to relieve traffic congestion, but let traffic reflect current conditions."

Average ratings of responses to these four items has remained almost exactly the same over the three years the survey has been conducted.

Downtown Parking

While citizens support the city pursuing alternatives to the automobile, 75% of survey respondents "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed that the city should provide more parking in the downtown area. Average responses to this question have remained fairly stable over the three year period. At the same time, the amount of parking available in the downtown increased in 1999 compared to the last two years by more than 800 spaces.

Transit Service

The statement receiving the highest amount of agreement from respondents was "The city of Boulder should provide additional frequent, small, bus service like the HOP and SKIP." Nearly 90% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, and only 10% disagreed.

In-Commuting, Tourism and Traffic Congestion

- One of the statements read to survey participants dealt with their perception of the cause of Boulder's traffic congestion. More than half (59%) of respondents agreed that most of Boulder's traffic problems were caused by in-commuters and tourists rather than residents, while 41% disagreed with this statement.

Respondents were also asked if they thought the city of Boulder should limit job growth in order to relieve current and future traffic congestion. This idea did not receive much support; just under a third of respondents agreed with this statement.

Response patterns to each of these questions has been consistent over the three year period, with average scores varying by only .1 between years.

Funding Transportation

- About half (51%) of respondents agreed that people who drive more should pay more of the costs of maintaining roads in Boulder. However, almost an equal proportion disagreed with the statement, and 30% "strongly" disagreed.

Over half (56%) agreed that new development should pay more than existing residents for transportation improvements in general. Those who opposed this idea did not feel quite as strongly (19% strongly disagreed) as those who did not like the idea that those who drive more should pay more.

Again, average ratings on these two items varied little among the three years.

Use of Transportation Monies

A larger proportion (60%) of respondents agreed that the city was spending taxpayer's transportation money wisely than disagreed with the statement (40%). Average scores on this item have not varied over the three survey years.

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Ratings of Boulder's Existing Transportation System

Bike paths and lanes received the highest ratings of the services and facilities rated, with a mean rating of 3.9 on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good). Over a quarter (28%) of respondents rated this part of the transportation infrastructure as "very good."

- The next highest ratings went to transit service and sidewalks; both averaged 3.7 on the 5-point scale. About 20% of respondents rated these as "very good."

- Parking in places other than downtown, condition of the streets, and neighborhood traffic safety received average ratings close to the middle of the scale, but slightly more on the positive side. Only about 10% of respondents gave "very good" ratings to these features.

- The average ratings for traffic signal timing and neighborhood traffic mitigation efforts were also close to the middle of the scale, but slightly more on the negative side. Somewhat more than 40% of respondents gave negative ratings to these features (44% and 43%, respectively).

Traffic congestion and parking in the downtown received the lowest ratings. About two-thirds of respondents gave "bad" or "very bad" ratings to these aspects of transportation in Boulder.

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Bus Use and Bus Passes

Respondents have been asked for the last two years (1998 & 1999) about their use of RTD bus service and bus pass programs. Responses varied little between the two years.

Overall, over 60% of respondents ride the bus less than once a month (62% in 1999, 65% in 1998). About 20% in each year report riding the bus once a week or more, either for work or other trips.

Similarly, around 60% of the respondents said they did not have a bus pass. Of those who do have passes, the most common type mentioned was the Buff One CU Student pass (15%-20%), followed by business sponsored Eco Passes (7%-12%). Generally speaking, pass holders tended to live within the city limits, be younger (18-24 years old), be more recent arrivals (lived here less than 5 years), or work in Boulder.

Not surprisingly, respondents who made a significant portion of their trips using alternate modes were more likely to have a bus pass (52%) than those who said they would like to use alternate modes more often (29%) or those who make most trips by driving alone (15%).

When non-pass holders were asked if having an Eco Pass would increase their bus use, about half in both years said this was "not very likely." This was especially true for men, respondents over 35 years old, and those who own homes and/or have lived here for over five years.

"Readiness to Change" to Alternative Mode Use

The survey also contained a question about people's behavior and attitude towards alternative modes versus driving alone. This question was included as an experimental effort to gauge the population's position on a "readiness to change" scale. Several theories of behavior change suggest that there are stages people must progress through in order to achieve a behavioral or lifestyle change, such as cessation of smoking or changes in eating habits. Response patterns have been similar throughout each of the three years of survey administration.

- About a quarter of respondents (26% in 1999) said they make most of their trips by driving alone, and were unlikely to change how they travel. These would be the residents in the "pre-contemplation" stage, in which people are not even aware that their existing habits are unhealthy or may contribute to a problem.

- About a third (36%) said they already make a significant proportion of their trips by using modes other than driving alone. These individuals are in the "action" or "maintenance" stage. In the action stage, people have begun to incorporate the behavior change into their life. In the maintenance stage, the new behavior is now integrated into their lifestyle.

The remainder of respondents (38% in 1999, down from 42% in 1998) said that while they currently make most of their trips by driving alone, they would like to use other modes for at least some of their trips. This group would be classified in the "contemplation" or "preparation" stages. In the contemplation and preparation stages, they may know that the behavior may contribute to a problem, and may be considering making changes, but have not yet actually made a behavioral change.

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Priorities and Methods of Funding for Transportation Projects

Each year the Transportation Survey asks a set of topical questions on a specific subject. This year respondents were asked about their preferences and priorities related to funding Transportation projects.

Spending Preferences for Transportation Projects by Mode Category

Respondents to the survey were asked to express their spending preference for a series of projects in five general areas: the street/road system; transit; the bicycle system; pedestrian walks and paths and transportation-related promotional/education efforts. Within the primary transportation modes, questions asked related to spending on major and minor maintenance projects, construction and expansion projects.

In the category of streets and auto-related projects, spending more on street improvements to reduce congestion (such as adding turning lanes) received the largest proportion of "spend more" responses (70%). Between 41% and 48% of respondents wanted "more" spent on the other five areas, which included minor street maintenance (e.g. pothole repair), major street maintenance (e.g. resurfacing), increasing road capacity (e.g. adding lanes), reducing traffic impacts on neighborhoods (e.g. speed control), and major street improvements such as new interchanges and roads.

Among the transit-related projects listed, survey respondents were uniformly supportive of spending more or the same amounts on various transit projects (including expansion of the Eco Pass program, increasing the number of bus routes and/or the frequency of buses on existing routes). Only 7-8% of respondents wanted "less" spent on any of these projects. The transit-related project that received the greatest support was expansion of the Eco Pass Program to include more of the community; 73% of respondents supported this project.

Of the three bicycle-related projects named, respondents were most desirous that more money be spent on construction of additional percent of survey participants suggested spending more money on this project; 28% wanted the city to spend "a lot more" money. About 60% of respondents wanted more money spent on expansion of the off-street bicycle system and 52% wanted more spent on maintenance of the existing bicycle system.

Pedestrian projects were also considered worth spending money on, with only 3-6% responding they wanted "less" spent

on construction or maintenance of sidewalks and other pedestrian paths. Among these, constructing "missing links" in the system was most preferred (71% wanted "more" spending on this), followed closely by construction of additional sidewalks/paths (69% "more") and less enthusiastically by maintenance of the existing system (37% wanting more spent on this, with 57% wanting about the same amount spent in this category).

Respondents were generally supportive of spending Transportation monies on education and promotional activities, although average ratings on these items tended to be a bit lower than for the other mentioned projects. Between 14% and 17% of those surveyed wanted "less" spending in these areas. Over half (59%) wanted more expenditures for promotion and education and 38% wanted more spent on safety education and marketing.

Considering all the projects named in all modes, the three that received the highest requests for spending were: expansion of the Eco Pass program (average rating of 3.92 on 5 point scale); construction of missing links in the existing sidewalk system (average of 3.9); and street improvements to enhance traffic flow and reduce congestion (average of 3.88).

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Top Priority Projects for Transportation Funding

In response to an open-ended question asking respondents to name up to three projects they would rate as highest priority for funding, increasing the number of bus routes was the most frequently mentioned (29% of respondents), followed by increasing the frequency of buses on existing routes (23%). Street improvements to enhance traffic flow was third most commonly mentioned (17%), followed by expansion of the off-street bike system (12%), construction of additional bike lanes (11%), and expansion of the road system (10%).

Responses to this priority question were aligned with respondents' general travel preferences in that those who already make use of alternate modes or wish to increase their alternate mode use were more likely to rate bus services and bike facilities as "high" priority, while those who prefer to drive alone were more likely to place a high priority on street improvements and road system expansion.

Financing Transportation Projects

When asked about how transportation projects, in general, should be funded, given that sufficient funds are not currently available to fund all projects, 42% of respondents felt that additional monies should be raised for transportation projects, rather than reducing funding to other areas in the city. The next largest proportion of respondents (35%) felt that transportation spending should be prioritized without either taking money from other city areas or raising more money, and the remaining 23% favored reducing other areas in the city to fund transportation projects.

Respondents were also asked if they would favor raising additional money if the projects to be funded were those they had identified as "high priority." Under these circumstances, most (76%) favored additional fundraising. Those who did not favor additional funding tended to be older (over 35 years), childless, homeowners, and/or people who preferred driving alone rather than using alternate modes of transportation.

Among those who favored raising additional money for the projects they named as "high priority," about half (51%) said they thought more money was needed to solve the current problems, especially traffic congestion (specifically mentioned by 18%). Another 12% of these respondents said they favored raising more money rather than reducing money to non-transportation projects.

Among those who opposed raising additional monies for the projects they named as "high priority," the most common reason given for this opposition related to their belief that the city should use the available money better (nearly half of the reasons given), followed by a desire not to have additional taxes (20%).

When respondents' opinions about fund raising were compared to the "top priority" projects they had identified, opposition was strongest among those who had identified street improvements (both traffic congestion relief and expansion of the road system) as "high priority" projects – 29% of those who had rated these types of projects as "high priority" opposed additional funding.

In the same comparison, the projects that received the largest proportion of "strongly favor" responses to the question of raising additional monies (by about one third of respondents) were "increasing the number of bus routes," "construction of additional bike lanes along major corridors," and "increasing the frequency of buses on existing routes." Around 90% of respondents who named these three projects "somewhat" or "strongly" favored raising additional monies to support them.

When given four options for raising additional transportation funds, the most popular one (favored by 55% of respondents) was an employee head tax paid by employers. Each of the other options had more respondents "opposed" than "favoring" – road tolls were the least popular option with 72% opposed, followed by additional property taxes (64% "oppose"), and additional city sales tax (59% opposition).

About two-thirds of respondents offered alternative suggestions for funding transportation projects. Among these an addition to the gasoline tax was most frequently mentioned (by 24% of those offering suggestions), followed by "taxes on business/new jobs" and "funds from state or federal government" at 13% each.

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For more information call 303-441-3266 or e-mail tmpinfo@bouldercolorado.gov